

## The Hard Sciences

If we say that science is the goal of trying to figure things out about the world, then we see the sciences broadly classified into two categories: “hard” and “soft”. In the former are subjects like physics, biology, and perhaps the honorary inclusion of mathematics. The “soft” sciences, by contrast, include fields like history, psychology, sociology, and economics.

As you might gather from the terms involved, partisans of the hard sciences often look down upon the softer sciences, considering them barely worthy of the term science at all. Indeed, the soft sciences rarely formulate general laws or clear predictions, as the harder sciences sometimes do. But why is that?

The reason is, because the “soft” sciences are, in fact, *harder*. Humans are far more complicated than atoms, trying to figure out how they work is a great deal more difficult than coming up with the rules of mechanics. As a result, the social sciences are less well developed, which means there’s less to study, which means the fields are easier to learn.

Nonetheless, since the field is so much harder, the people who make progress in it should get *more* respect. Physicists can isolate atoms and run an experiment; historians have to try to find clever ways to make a “natural experiment”.

Obviously, the progress has to be actual, rather than simply perceived, which is indeed a common confusion in the social sciences, but real observers of science should reconsider who they esteem.

*You should follow me on twitter [here](#).*

July 11, 2006